

## Tapes, Kirbo Echo Watergate

WASHINGTON — Atlanta attorney Charles Kirbo, the pal of the president, has been caught in a trap of his own making — a trap he had set for us, with the help of White House aide Richard Harden.

Taking a leaf from Richard Nixon's Watergate book, Kirbo sought to discredit our story about the Robert Vesco scandal and to destroy our reputation in the process. He launched a Nixon-style investigation of us, coordinating his efforts with the White House and conferring regularly with Attorney General Griffin Bell.

The distinguished King & Spaulding law firm gave Kirbo and an associate, Charles Tisdale, time off to conduct the probe at no cost to President Carter. A White House spokesman acknowledged that the president is never billed for Kirbo's services.

In a sense, Kirbo and Tisdale are now functioning as Carter's "plumbers." This is a nickname that became attached to G. Gordon Liddy and E. Howard Hunt, who conducted extracurricular investigations for Nixon.

The FBI has evidence that Kirbo plotted with Harden to suborn one of our news sources. Calling from the White House, Harden persuaded his sister-in-law, Mrs. Tina Harden, to induce the source, Cynthia Herring, to meet with Kirbo. (We have Cynthia Herring's permission to use her name.)

In an atmosphere of high intrigue, a rendezvous was arranged at Mrs. Harden's apartment in Albany, Ga. FBI sources say that Kirbo kept a private plane standing by to whisk him from Atlanta to Albany for the secret interrogation.

Mrs. Herring is represented by Benjamin B. Brown, a Rockville, Md. attorney, who retained one of the nation's sharpest private detectives to investigate the case. Mrs. Herring notified the detective, Richard Bast, of Kirbo's approach. To protect her, Bast wired her with a recording device so she would have a record of the conversation. The tape has now been turned over to the FBI.

Kirbo is a crafty country lawyer, slow and dry of speech, who made it big in Atlanta. But he still carefully cultivates an avuncular, crackerbarrel image.

He started off by reassuring Mrs. Herring that he came from her corner of Georgia. "I'm just an ordinary South Georgia cracker you're talking to," he drawled.

Together, Kirbo and Tisdale amiably pumped her for information that they could use against us. She did not give them the answers, however, that they

dead cat that now hangs heavy around his neck.

Here are a few of Kirbo's contradictions:

—Kirbo implied to newsmen after talking to Mrs. Herring that we had plotted with our informants to concoct fake documentation. He knew this was untrue. Although she acknowledged on the tape that two letters had been reconstructed, she swore to Kirbo: "Jack (Anderson) did not know. He had no idea."

—Kirbo also suggested that we knew the letters weren't really reconstructions but fabrications. On the contrary, influence peddler R. L. Herring has testified in federal court that he lost the originals on an airplane flight and reconstructed them from memory. His former secretary, Gerolyn Hobbs, has also sworn before a federal judge that she typed and mailed the originals. In any event, Mrs. Herring told Kirbo: "I don't know why Herring had to do those letters because he had plenty of proof without that. Now that's what some of the other people connected with R.L. said."

—Kirbo contended that we presented the letters as genuine even though their authenticity had been challenged. Not true. From the first, we took pains to emphasize that the letters were disputed. We quoted the alleged signatory, Spencer Lee IV, as denying

he wrote them. Our first reference to the letters carried the careful qualification "if valid." Of course, we also cited the secretary's sworn testimony that she had typed and mailed the letters.

—Kirbo told reporters that even after we learned about the dubious origin of the letters, we continued to base columns on them. This is not what Mrs. Herring told him. She stated on the tape that Anderson "said it was his duty as a reporter and as a citizen to make (the reconstructions) known as soon as possible. . . Jack did everything he possibly could to get the story out." The fact that the letters had been rewritten was also uncovered by us, not by Kirbo.

—In statements to the press, Kirbo claimed we did not initiate the investigation of the reconstructed documents as we had reported. He insisted we didn't act until Mrs. Herring told us voluntarily about her role in retyping one of the letters. Again, the secret tape proves Kirbo deliberately misrepresented the facts; she can be heard on the tape clearly confirming our report.

—The president's attorney even distorted the minor details. He told reporters that the private detective worked for us, although Mrs. Herring told Kirbo that Bast "was working for the lawyer in Washington that R.L. hired."

Kirbo made more misstatements, indeed, than we have space to chronicle.

Footnote: Kirbo has refused to communicate with us. We have been obliged, therefore, to rely on newsmen who read from their notes what the Atlanta attorney told them.

### Ted tests nuclear 'reaction'

wanted.

If this disappointed Kirbo, it didn't deter him. He simply distorted what she had said and mounted a calculated campaign of slurs and lies against us.

But like Nixon before him, the unfortunate Kirbo has become snagged by a secret tape that contradicts his public statements. His campaign of denial and distortion, therefore, has turned into a